REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of the above-identified application, as presently amended, is respectfully requested. Claims 1-5 have been amended. New claim 9 has been added. Claims 6-8 have been canceled. Applicant respectfully submits that no new matter has been added. Therefore, claims 1-5 and 9 are currently pending in the present application. A replacement abstract is also submitted. Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the application in view of the foregoing amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 4-5 stand objected to as being in improper form. In response, claims 4-5 have been amended to depend from claim 1 and are therefore in accordance with 37 C.F.R. § 1.75. Applicant respectfully requests that the claim objections to claims 4-5 be withdrawn.

Claims 1-3 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicant regards as the invention. In response, claim 1 has been amended to remove the term "a".

Claims 1-3 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by WO 9609882 A1 ("Solheim"). Solheim discloses a method and an apparatus for hydrolysis of organic materials. Applicant respectfully submits that Solheim fails to teach or suggest at least one of the distinguishing features of independent claim 1, namely, heating a sludge in a heat exchanger. In addition, Solheim fails to teach or suggest mixing the sludge with steam at a pressure of 1-4 bars in a first mixing unit and leading a sludge/steam mixture to a preheating tank. Furthermore, Solheim fails to teach or suggest increasing a pressure of the sludge/steam mixture from 3 to 10 bars in a second mixing unit and leading the sludge/steam mixture to a reactor.

Solheim discloses a plant for hydrolysis of organic materials consisting of four reaction vessels. A mixture of organic material and water is fed into the first reaction vessel. Steam is also conducted into the first reaction vessel. When a temperature of the mixture in the first reaction vessel has reached a desired level, the mixture is transferred to a second reaction vessel. The mixture in the second reaction vessel is heated to 130° C. Steam from a third

reaction vessel is released into the second reaction vessel. The hydrolysis mass in the third reaction vessel is transferred to a fourth reaction vessel.

In contrast to claim 1, there is no teaching or suggestion by Solheim of heating a sludge in a heat exchanger, as in claim 1. In Solheim, the sludge is not preheated in a heat exchanger. However, in Solheim, the sludge is introduced into a first vessel where the sludge is heated by the introduction of steam. Additionally, in contrast to claim 1, there is no teaching or suggestion by Solheim of mixing the sludge with steam at a pressure of 1-4 bars in a first mixing unit and leading a sludge/steam mixture to a preheating tank. In Solheim, the mixing of sludge with steam or the heating of sludge takes place in a first reaction vessel and not in the first mixing unit, as in claim 1. According to claim 1, the sludge is mixed with steam or heated in the first mixing unit before being transferred to the preheating tank. However, according to Solheim, the sludge is heated after the sludge is introduced in the first reaction vessel. Furthermore, in contrast to claim 1, there is no teaching or suggestion by Solheim of increasing a pressure of the sludge/steam mixture from 3 to 10 bars in a second mixing unit and leading the sludge/steam mixture to a reactor. In Solheim, the mixing of sludge with steam takes place in a third reaction vessel after the sludge is introduced in the third reaction vessel. Applicant respectfully submits that claim 1 distinguishes over Solheim and is in condition for allowance. Withdrawal of the rejection of claim 1 as anticipated by Solheim is respectfully requested.

Dependent claims 2-5 and 9 depend from and further restrict independent claim 1 in a patentable sense. Applicant respectfully submits that, for at least the reasons set forth above with respect to the rejection of independent claim 1, dependent claims 2-5 and 9 distinguish over Solheim and are in condition for allowance. Withdrawal of the rejection of dependent claims 2-5 and 9 is respectfully requested.

In addition, Applicant respectfully submits that Solheim fails to teach or suggest at least one other of the distinguishing features of dependent claim 2, namely, a sludge from a heating step is heated through heat exchange in a heat exchanger with the sludge from a separating step. Solheim is silent with regards to heat exchange. Applicant respectfully submits that dependent claim 2 distinguishes over Solheim. Applicant respectfully requests that the rejection of claim 2 be withdrawn.

New claim 9 recites the step of "cooling the sludge". Claim 9 recites features similar to those deleted from claim 1. Support for new claim 9 may be found at, for example, page 2, line 16. Claim 9 is deemed to distinguish over Solheim for at least the reasons stated above with respect to claim 1.

In view of the above amendment, applicant believes the pending application is in condition for allowance.

Dated: October 5, 2004

Respectfully submitted,

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